Usability Testing

Oxleas Children's Integrated Therapies Website

Contents

Executive Summary

The NHS Long Term Plan aims to increase the range of digital health tools and services, on the basis that supporting people to get online and use digital health resources can be crucial to achieving local priorities[1]. Between 2019-20 and 2023-24, it is estimated that up to £8.1 billion will be spent on digital transformation[2].

Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust asked Healthwatch Greenwich to support a review, using usability testing, of its website, 'Children's Integrated Therapies' (CIT)[3]. The purpose of this exercise was to inform the development of these pages and contribute to the transformation of the website to better support parents and carers of children who use Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Speech and Language Therapists - often called 'integrated therapies'. Integrated therapies usually work with Early Years Children, School Age Children and those that attend Special Schools.

User testing found that despite their children being regular users of some or all the therapies, most parents and carers were unaware of the Children's Integrated Therapies website. Few parents had seen the site before, and many struggled to find it - it took parents several attempts to find the correct website from a Google search with several also commenting that the site didn't appear to be affiliated with the NHS. Similarly, most parents found the site confusing and frustrating to navigate. Key information wasn't easy to find – such as contact details – and accessibility options, for those with additional linguistic needs or disability, were limited. Photos on the site did not represent children with disabilities. However, after going through the website during our testing sessions, parents felt that information on the site could nonetheless be useful to them – if presented in a more condensed or accessible way, such as plainer English and less clinical language.

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[1] NHS Long Term Plan » Digital transformation
[2] Digital transformation in the NHS (nao.org.uk)
[3] Home Page - Integrated TherapiesIntegrated Therapies (childrensintegratedtherapies.co.uk)

About

Healthwatch Greenwich (HWG) is an independent, statutory organisation representing people and communities who use NHS and publicly funded health and care services in Greenwich. We carry out qualitative and quantitative engagement and research on a wide variety of health and social care topics. Our mission is to drive change, campaign for and influence commissioners, providers, and regulators to ensure the design and delivery of services is equitable for all.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the staff at Oxleas and the parents and carers who participated in focus groups and user testing sessions. We would also like to thank Victoria House, Family Support Worker at Willow Dene School, who helped to facilitate meetings with parents.

Aim

To assess the functionality of the Children's Integrated Therapies website and the extent to which it meets the needs of service users, primarily parents and carers. Particular focus was placed on parents and carers from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and those living with disability.

This project considered the following questions:

1) Previous experience using the Children's Integrated Therapies website (if applicable)

2) Search terms used and number of steps to find the correct pages.

3) How/if participants know they have found the correct pages

4) Clarity of information

5) Quality of information

6) Accessibility of information

7) Gaps or missing information

Methodology

Usability testing is a method of assessing the functionality of a website or digital product by getting real people to interact with it. Those testing the website complete tasks, their actions and reactions are observed, and real-time feedback is solicited. The goal of usability testing is to reveal areas of confusion and uncover opportunities to improve the overall user experience. Usability testing is one way to support the development of an effective and efficient digital product for those using it. We carried out usability testing with two groups of participants:

1) Staff members working within the Children's Integrated Therapies team.

2) Parents and carers of children who were either using or could use the services of the Children's Integrated Therapies team.

Each session was facilitated, observed, and conducted in-person using a set of online tasks and questions. Participants performed specific functions and gave real-time feedback. Tasks were completed on either a laptop, mobile phone, or tablet. Staff and Healthwatch Greenwich volunteers took observational notes of how tasks were completed and, where possible, conversations were audio recorded.

Staff: profile and sample size

13 members of the Oxleas Children's Integrated Therapies team were invited to take part in usability testing. Three members of the team attended. All three worked within the Speech and & Language Therapy divisions.

Parents and carers: profile and sample size

User testing sessions were held with 17 parents and carers of children with SEN between December 2022 and March 2023. Most children were either using or had used the services of the Children's Integrated Therapies team, mainly Speech and Language therapy.

Parents and carers were recruited through Willow Dene school. An initial pilot session was held with one parent to test the tasks and the overall process. Two further sessions were held with 7 and 9 parents respectively. Below is a demographic breakdown of parents and carers. Efforts were made to ensure that participants reflected the diversity of Greenwich's population in terms of age, ethnicity, disability, and caring responsibilities.

	Number of parents/carers (out of total of 17)
Living with a disability or long-term condition	3
Carer[4]	16
White British	5
Black/Black British	9
Asian/Asian British	2
Mixed ethnicity	1

Parents and carers were compensated with a £30 shopping voucher as a thank you for taking part.

[4] Understood as someone that looks after or gives any help or support to a family member, friend or neighbour because of long term physical disability, mental ill-health or problems related to old age.

Findings

We present our findings as they relate to the following sections:

1) **General impressions:** What do staff, parents and carers feel about the website?

2) **Initial navigation pathways**: to what extent can staff, parents and carers easily find the children's integrated therapies pages?

3) **Clarity and accuracy of information**: to what extent is information clear, understandable, and up to date?

4) **Presentation of information and accessibility:** to what extent can information be found quickly and easily? Is information accessible on different formats/devices? Is the information accessible to service users with additional linguistics needs or disability limitations?

General impressions

Parents and carers were unfamiliar with the Children's Integrated Therapies (CIT) website. Despite most using the services of the CIT team for their children, none had used or heard about the website before. Indeed, parents were surprised that they had never been directed to the website by CIT staff, or seen it on any communication or documentation received from CIT.

I've never heard of the website before.

Parent

Staff members similarly had little interaction with the website, with only one having used it prior to the testing session and only to access a referral form. Rather than using the website, staff preferred

to provide or signpost parents to resources that they or their teams had put together. This was partly a lack of familiarity with the website but more importantly, bespoke resources could be quickly and easily updated, unlike the website. Indeed, there was no knowledge of how information on the website could be amended or changed when required.

I don't really use the site…The only time I use is to get a referral form…The site is just not currently useful for parents or service users.

Staff member

Parents had a range of interpretations of what services CIT offered and therefore what information the website should offer, suggesting that the term 'Children's Integrated Therapies' is not widely understood and does not resonate with how parents and carers interact with services.

Staff, parents, and carers commented on the general appearance of the website. While colourful photos and stylistic choices gave it a friendly appearance, it lacked representation of disability and diversity of ages amongst children portrayed. As such, the images did not reflect the children the service supports. Staff suggested that including pictures of what buildings and therapy rooms look like would support parents and carers when accessing services, both in finding the correct location and in visualising what to expect when entering a therapy room. Overall, information on the Children's Integrated Therapies website was regarded as *"service focused rather than parent focused" (staff member)*.

Initial navigation pathways

A few participants found tasks more challenging due to limited fluency in English or a lack of familiarity using digital devices. However, most participants were confident web users, accustomed

to using the internet, via phones or laptops, to search for information or resources when needed.

The first task participants completed was simply to find the Children's Integrated Therapies website, and this proved to be the most challenging. Parents and carers became frustrated with the length of time it took to find the website. On average, it took around 5 minutes and 5-6 tries to find the correct page.

If I was at home, I would've thrown my phone by now or given it to my kids to sort it out.

Parent

If I was searching for this [website], I wouldn't have known which one it was.

Parent

Parents and carers all tried to find the site via Google. Search terms such as "children's integrated therapies" did not immediately direct them to the correct page, with several participants ending up at the Barnet, East Sussex or Oxfordshire children's integrated therapies pages.

When participants typed in more specific search terms, such as "children's integrated therapies Greenwich" or "children's integrated therapies Oxleas," they were able to find the correct site faster. However these searches often encouraged participants to click the first link at the top of the page or the one suggested by Google, which didn't directly take them to the right webpage, but instead took them to the Greenwich Community Directory page.

Even when specific search terms were used, or the correct webpage was placed at the top of a Google search, parents and carers felt unsure of the veracity of the site because of a lack of "NHS" in the weblink.

Staff members found the site relatively quickly, with all accessing the site via the Oxleas website before trying a Google search. Unsurprisingly, staff were more familiar with what search terms to use and how to identity the correct site, but they also felt that getting to the site could be challenging for parents and carers.

Clarity and accuracy of information

Parents and carers found some terms used on the site confusing and unclear. For some this stemmed from their understanding of the term of 'integrated':

- *"One place where you can collect information you need".*

- *"a place that offers different therapies".*

- *"One place for specialist care for your children"*

Staff agreed the term 'integrated' was "not meaningful" to parents and carers, and (in their experience) nor did parents and carers equate it with the services their children used. Staff pointed out that specialist terms such as "INDT" (integrated neurodevelopment) and

"service group" were too clinical and not relevant to parents and carers – *"It should say age group instead".*

What does 'rapid response team' mean? Would parents know what this term means?

Staff member

The term 'service group' conjured up a range of meanings for parents and carers:

- *"Parents and carers"*

- *"Schools that use service on behalf of users".*

- *"Absolutely nothing"*

Parents and carers did not have a consistent understanding of what the CIT service provides and therefore, what information to expect from the webpages. The use of abstract terminology such as "rapid response team" or acronyms such as INDT (Integrated Neurodevelopment Team) creates the impression of a 'service focused' site rather than one aimed at the needs of parents and carers.

Parents and carers were clear on the information they would look for and expect to find, easily and in plain English, from the site:

- how to contact the service – telephone number and email

- explanation on how children are assessed for support/whether their children are eligible for support/any exclusion criteria.

- details on what forms of support are offered by the team/what to expect.

While some of this information is available on the webpage, parents struggled to find it quickly or easily, and were confused about which tabs or pages within the site would direct them to the right information. Some parents used the search feature on the webpage to try to find information. However, these searches often produced

no results, with the feature only seeming to work when terms used exactly matched the title of webpages.

Parents and carers did not find, or found confusing, information on the site on how to refer into the service or how to access support if needed. For instance, on the "Parents and Carers" tab it suggests *"parent's and carers can refer to the service directly"*. However, the referral form attached as a link, states *"We ONLY accept referrals from Health, Education and Social Care professionals. NO SELF-REFERRALS."*

Confusion amongst parents and carers around how or if they can access the service reflected observations from staff who noted that information on service pathways, how the service is commissioned, and how children can access it, was missing or hard to find. Staff noted that better explanation of pathways and how the service is commissioned could help manage expectations amongst parents and carers.

Overall, challenges for parents and carers included:

- length of time required to find specific pieces of key information.

- need to sift through dense amounts of text and of repeated bits of information.

- need to navigate through multiple pages within the website.

- need to try and figure out what was being said as language used is too clinical.

- requirement to figure out if information was correct because as much appeared out of date (covid requirements?)

It's given me too much headache to find anything.

Parent

To get some information, you need to go through the website but it's not easy.

Parent

Indeed, staff noted that some information on the website was not accurate or up to date, such as contact information, dates and times of drop-in groups, and guidance related to Covid processes or procedures. Staff also pointed out that some links, such as "Further Information->Links to Useful Websites" did not work.

Outdated or inaccurate information on the site supported staff concerns of the lack of connection between the website and the staff delivering the children's integrated therapies services. This reinforced the need to create and provide their own resources for parents and carers.

Presentation and accessibility of information

Parents and carers overwhelmingly found the breadth and amount of information on the website frustrating and difficult to navigate. Menu options on the main page and the overall layout was confusing. Information is replicated across several pages of the site. For instance, "Occupational Therapy for Early Years" can be found by clicking both the 'Therapies' tab, as well as the "Service Group" tap. This created challenges for parents and carers to find information quickly and easily.

Several usability testing tasks involved finding specific information on the website, such as contact information, referral forms, advice for School Years Support, or Speech and Language Therapy. While important information, such as contact details, was easily found by most (who navigated to the bottom of the page) this information could have been more prominent. Staff noted that contact information was not correct with a misspelt email address and a phone number for a general Oxleas line.

An important distinction emerged between laptops and mobile phones. On laptops, photos at the top of the page take up a lot of space, making it hard to see text beneath. Phone users found information easier to find as photos weren't as prominent. As most parents suggested they use their phones to find information, this was an important observation.

Despite difficultly finding information, and it not always being presented in easily understood language, many parents and carers found the information useful. However, the complex navigation was off-putting, particularly for parents and carers who would only use the website in times of specific need, often at a time of anxiety or heightened stress.

Staff, parents, and carers all considered accessibility of the site to be poor for those with additional language needs or disability limitations. The website does not provide BSL support, text-to-speech features, or a language translation option. Feedback from a parent who speaks English as a second language, found the site created an additional barrier without translation options.

Conclusion

Usability testing of the Oxleas Children's Integrated Therapies website found that awareness and use of the site is low amongst parents and carers, as well as staff members working within integrated therapies teams. Challenges feedings into and updating the site with current and relevant resources meant that staff were more likely to use their own resources to guide parents and carers, who themselves were reliant on service professionals to direct them to appropriate support.

Throughout different tasks, parents and carers expressed confusion and frustration with the site, including simply trying to find and access the website, as well as trying to navigate through the vast amount of information. While parents and carers felt that much on the website was useful, the breadth of information, it's replication across different pages, the terminology used and the limited accessibility for those with additional linguistic needs or disability limitations, left parents and carers struggling to find information needed to support their children quickly and easily.

Overall, the site appears better suited to services and service professionals, who know what terms to use to elicit the correct information and what they mean, rather than parents and carers of children with SEN.

Limitations

- Only 3 members of staff took part in this project, all of whom work within the Speech and Language team. As such, we are missing the perspective of other CIT staff/teams.

- None of the parents and carers who took part were familiar with the website. As such, the insight of those with some experience navigating the website are not included.

- User testing took place in a controlled environment, which does not reflect the real-world situation in which parents and carers might use the website. This limits our ability to identify all usability issues.

- Our user testing focused on evaluating specific aspects of the CIT website. As such, we have not captured broader issues related to user experience, such as emotional responses or long-term engagement.

Recommendations

1. Simplify the language used on the website and evaluate for 'plain English' standards.

2. Improve website accessibility and evaluate for accessibility standards.

3. Condense the amount of information on the website so that parents and carers can quickly find what they need.

4. Review the information provided so that it better meets the needs of parents and carers.

5. Minimise the duplication of information across different pages of the website.

6. Provide more representative photographs.

7. Ensure staff are aware of the process to update and amend website information